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NOTES FOR BEGINNERS.

BY WILLIAM R. HARPER.

In General.—It is the purpose of the writer to furnish under this head in successive numbers of **HEBRAICA**, some material which, it is hoped, may prove to be interesting and profitable to that large class of the journal's constituency, those who are *beginners*. The word *beginner* is not, however, in this connection taken in its literal sense. While some of the suggestions made, and some of the hints offered may be of value only to those who are actual beginners, the material, in general, will be intended for those who have made at least some progress in the language. The "Notes" will be varied in their character, and designed to stimulate study in lines which perhaps the student, if left to himself, might overlook.

Origin of Various Vowel-sounds.—In the study of Hebrew the greatest difficulty experienced is the mastery of the principles which regulate the use of the various vowel-points. The question which one must ask and answer, several times perhaps in the case of every word, is this: How does there come to be here a Š'wâ, or a short vowel, or a long vowel? And in this question there are implied many subordinate questions. E. g., if it is a Š'wâ, it must be known (1) whether it is silent or vocal; (2) if vocal, from what earlier full vowel-sound it is derived; and (3) why it was changed from this original sound to a Š'wâ. If the vowel under consideration is *long*, the questions are: (1) What kind of a syllable is this? (2) Is the vowel tone-long or naturally long? (3) If naturally long, has it arisen from contraction, or in compensation, or because it is characteristic of a nominal form? (4) From what original sound or sounds has it come?

These questions can *always* be answered; and the man who has studied his Hebrew grammar through without learning the principles which furnish the answers, has studied it in vain. It is to be remembered, that a knowledge of the Massoretic system of vowel-points lies at the basis of all truly accurate and scientific knowledge of Hebrew. With this once mastered, the remaining work is comparatively easy.

Relative Occurrence of Vowel-sounds.—It may be of interest to know the relative frequency of occurrence of half-, short and long vowels in Hebrew. There is given below a table from which a reasonably accurate idea may be gained. The first four chapters of Genesis have been taken as a basis for calculation. This table shows that the average word has 2.76 vowel-sounds; that of a hundred vowel-sounds nearly sixteen are half-vowels, twenty-nine are short